

NORTH CAROLINA AVENUE
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-705
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NORTH CAROLINA AVENUE

HABS No. DC-705

Location: North Carolina Avenue extends from the intersection of New Jersey Avenue and G Street, SE, northeast in a straight line to the planned boundary of the historic city at C Street, NE.

Owner/Manager: The right-of-way spanning from building line to building line is the property of the U.S. government while the paved roadways, sidewalks and the parked areas between are under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia Department of Public Works. The reservations at Folger Park, Seward Square, and Lincoln Park are maintained by the National Park Service, the remaining smaller parks are managed by the District of Columbia Department of Recreation.

Present Use: Minor thoroughfare used mostly by local traffic.

Significance: This avenue remains faithful to its design on the L'Enfant and Ellicott city plans. The reservations on the avenue are largely intact since their official recognition in 1894, and several contain markers and fences dating to the 1890s. Most of the avenue--from Second Street, SE to 14th Street, NE,--is within the National Register Capitol Hill Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.
- B. Historical Context:

On the L'Enfant Plan of 1791, the street that roughly corresponds to North Carolina Avenue originates at a yellow-shaded reservation on Pennsylvania Avenue indicated as No. 14 (Seward Square, see HABS No. DC-685) and continues northeast at 56 degrees through an open square at B Street, SE, to a large rectangular area where it intersects with three avenues (Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Tennessee). This space is marked with a "B" (Lincoln Park, see HABS No. DC-677) on the map, designating it as a site for a column or obelisk. From this park, the avenue continues about four more blocks to the city limits (C Street, NE). L'Enfant indicated with dotted lines that North Carolina Avenue should continue northeast beyond the original city boundary.

On Andrew Ellicott's plan of 1792, the avenue rises at 61 degrees northeast from its origin at New Jersey Avenue on the north corner of a large open space (Reservation 17, Garfield Park, see HABS No. DC-674). Among the larger parks planned in the city, this reservation, several blocks south of the Capitol, may have been intended by L'Enfant for a city hall. One block northeast of this large open space, D Street intersects the avenue. At this intersection, D Street changes latitude, thereby forming a rectangular open space at the intersection (Folger Park, see HABS No. DC-672). One block northeast, a large open rectangle is formed by the intersection of North Carolina and Pennsylvania avenues. After this open rectangle, the avenue continues for five blocks without interruption before meeting a large open square (Lincoln Park) at the intersection of North Carolina, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Tennessee avenues and East Capitol Street, then continues five more blocks before terminating at C Street, NE.

According to a property map of the city, the land over which this avenue spans crossed the property of Daniel Carroll, William Proust, Abraham Young, and

George Walker.¹ After the seat of government was moved to the city in 1800, the earliest development on the avenue began at its west end, near the U.S. Capitol. Rather than purchasing homes in the primitive city, congressmen preferred to reside in inns and boarding houses near the Capitol. The 1857-61 Boschke Map shows a few rowhouses facing onto the avenue between Garfield Park and Seward Square. North of Pennsylvania Avenue, the avenue appears uncleared, although the Department of the Interior, charged with the improvement of public grounds, had formulated a landscape scheme for the large rectangle at the Massachusetts Avenue intersection as early as 1853. It is not clear if this plan was ever fulfilled, but tradition holds that the large open space that later became Lincoln Park was used as an army hospital during the Civil War.

At the west end of the avenue, a group of nuns founded a civilian hospital in 1866 in a frame house on the corner of Second and D streets. As local demands on the hospital grew, the nuns gradually purchased all of the lots in City Square No. 764 between Second and Third streets, on the south side of the large federally owned open space. In 1872, the nuns erected Providence Hospital in the square. The large brick edifice became a focus of the neighborhood and probably contributed to its subsequent development.² The federal open space north of the hospital, referred to as Providence Hospital Square in a real estate book in 1876, remained unimproved until 1882.³

During a decade of rapid city growth in the 1870s, Eastern Market was constructed on Seventh Street while brick rowhouses began to line the avenue. According to an 1870 law, property owners were not only allowed, but encouraged, to treat the wide strip of land between their property line and the edge of the sidewalk as their front yard after widths for roadways and sidewalks were determined by the city government.

By 1881, the avenue was graded and paved with gravel from its origin at First Street, SE, to Lincoln Park; poplar and elm trees planted by the city government stood in uniform rows between the sidewalks and newly paved streets. The open spaces at the intersections of the streets with the diagonal avenues, under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G) from 1867 to 1933, were gradually improved as parks as the neighborhoods around them developed toward the turn of the century.

The first park improved on North Carolina was the large rectangle at the intersection with Massachusetts Avenue. Named Lincoln Park in 1867, it was landscaped between 1874-76 with meandering paths with trees, shrubs, flowerbeds, a statue of Abraham Lincoln, and an ornate frame lodge housing lavatories for visitors and storage for the watchmen who maintained the park. The open space between Second and Third streets north of Providence Hospital was officially named Folger Park, and was landscaped in 1882 with trees, grass, and a cast-iron post-and-chain fence. The large open space at the intersection with Pennsylvania Avenue was never made into a large rectangular park, but instead remained fragmented by the intersecting streets and avenues into a group of triangles. The group of triangles, referred to as Seward Square, were all landscaped by 1884 and

¹ Toner map.

² Goode, Capital Losses, 392-94.

³ Annual Report . . ., 1872, 23.

featured grass and post-and-chain fences. Throughout the 1890s most of the small trapezoids and triangles between Seward Square and Lincoln Park were graded, sodded, and surrounded by post-and-chain fences. To mark these reservations as federal property, the OPB&G placed granite markers in their corners inscribed with "US OPB&G." Several of these markers and cast-iron post-and-chain fences remain in place today.

The segment of the avenue west of Lincoln Park was almost fully developed by the turn of the century. By 1903, the roadway was paved with asphalt blocks and lined with mature trees; the parks along it were landscaped uniformly with fencing and formal plantings. The lots facing the avenue featured two- and three-story rowhouses with wide front yards, many of them fenced in and planted with trees and flowers.

East of Lincoln Park, development continued through the first decades of the twentieth century. Through the 1890s there was a race track on the south side of the avenue between 14th and 15th streets, and children and community teams played baseball in a large open field nearby. By the 1920s, however, these vacant lots were lined with modest brick rowhouses, facing onto the newly paved avenue dotted with enclosed grassy reservations.

Since its initial development in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the avenue has remained residential with most of the original structures intact. Providence Hospital, however, was demolished in 1964. Congress subsequently purchased the vacant square to use for additional parking, but the local community protested. Today the lot remains under the jurisdiction of the Architect of the Capitol and its simple landscape featuring a large central lawn with flower beds and trees planted in each corner. After a period of decline in the mid-twentieth century, the historic character of the area has come to be appreciated, and much of Capitol Hill is now listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. All of North Carolina Avenue, between First and Eleventh streets is included in this district which has been described as follows:

"It has more grand 160-foot-wide avenues original to the L'Enfant Plan than elsewhere in the city, and the juxtaposition of these avenues with their wide setbacks, their squares, and their frequently imposing architecture and the narrower grid streets with their smaller scale structures creates an urban quality unique to this area."⁴

Eastern Market, also listed as a national and local landmark, remains a vital part of North Carolina Avenue. Nevertheless, threats to drastically alter the 120-year-old structure have galvanized the local citizenry to protect this popular gathering place.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Overall dimensions:

1. Width: From building line to building line, the avenue is 160' wide.
2. Length: All of the avenue is within the historic city boundaries, and it is

⁴ National Register nomination, Capitol Hill Historic District.

1.5 miles long.

B. Elements within the right-of-way:

1. Roadway: Between the curbs, the paved roadway supports two-lane, two-way traffic and parallel street parking. Within the roadway are the following medians:
 - a. Reservation No. 229 has been carved into several traffic directing medians and traffic islands to aid traffic.
 - b. A small triangular median divides north- and southbound traffic entering the one-way roadway (counter-clockwise) around Folger Park. Entirely paved in concrete it contains several signs.
 - c. South of Reservation No. 236, a brick median with a concrete curb cut on its east side divides east- and westbound traffic on North Carolina Avenue.
 - d. South of the west part of Reservation No. 237 is a brick median with a curb cut and a sign on the west side.
 - e. South of the east part of Reservation No. 237 is a grass median.
 - f. South of Reservation No. 239 is a long grass median extending between 15th and 17th streets.
2. Sidewalks and street trees: The brick and concrete sidewalks are flanked by sodded strips that are so wide in several blocks that narrow walks have been laid to span the distance from the main sidewalk to the street. Mature trees line the blocks southwest of Seward Square, while trees are planted less consistently northeast of the intersection. The strips between the roadway and sidewalks also contain traffic and parking signs, parking meters, traffic signals, highway lamps, and square fiberglass trash receptacles.
3. Major reservations:
 - a. North Carolina Avenue traffic is diverted around Folger Park, Reservation No. 16, between Second and Third streets, SE (See HABS No. DC-672).
 - b. North Carolina Avenue traffic is diverted around Seward Square, Reservation Nos. 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42, between Fourth and Sixth streets, SE (See HABS No. DC-685).
 - c. Between Eleventh and 13th Streets, SE and NE, North Carolina Avenue traffic is diverted around Lincoln Park, Reservation No. 14 (See HABS No. DC-677).
4. Smaller reservations: All the smaller reservations along North Carolina Avenue remain intact since their enumeration in 1894. Reservation No.

229 was transferred from the NPS jurisdiction to the District of Columbia May 14, 1969, and the rest were transferred December 14, 1972. The following list describes the historic and current appearance (as of summer 1990) of each reservation.

- a. Reservation No. 229: South of the avenue at First and E streets, SE. Officially recognized in 1881, this reservation was originally a large triangle of almost 10,000 square feet. It formed the acute angle on a lot shared by the St. Catherine Home for Working Girls in City Square No. 735. By 1894 it was graded and sodded and in 1903 was surrounded with a post-and-chain fence. After it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia May 14, 1969, it was fragmented into five pieces by First Street and the addition of a median strip on E Street. Both of the larger pieces are planted with grass and are surrounded by quarter-round coping; the east triangle has a small evergreen tree planted in the center.
- b. Reservation No. 230: North of the avenue at Seventh Street and Independence Avenue, SE. Officially identified in 1884, this trapezoid abutting City Square No. 871 and opposite Eastern Market was first improved in 1903. In 1908 it was enclosed with a post-and-chain fence. Through a D.C. Department of Public Works initiative, the Public Space Project, the park is maintained by the nearby Hayden's Liquor store. It is planted with shade and ornamental trees and flowering shrub beds. Curvilinear brick paths lead to a central gravel playground circle with a large stone turtle and three smaller turtles for climbing. Concrete-support, wood-slat benches surround the gravel circle. An additional wood bench with a dedication plaque is located east of the play area facing the intersection of North Carolina and Independence avenues.
- c. Reservation No. 231: South of the avenue on the west side of Eighth Street at Independence Avenue, SE. Officially identified as federal property in 1894, this freestanding triangle was graded and sodded. In 1903 it was enclosed with a cast-iron post-and-chain fence. Also maintained under the D.C. Public Space Project, this reservation retains its original fence. It also features one of the OPB&G reservation markers placed in parks throughout the city between 1901 and 1920 to prevent trespass on federal land. In addition to the fence, the reservation is sodded and features a single ornamental tree.
- d. Reservation No. 232: South of the avenue, east of Eight Street at Independence Avenue, SE. This trapezoidal reservation abutting City Square No. 922 was officially identified in 1884 and was improved with irrigation pipes, a post-and-chain fence, and a flower bed by 1894. In 1903 a post-and-chain fence was erected around it. It now features a modern landscape design with a central circular bed surrounded by a circular brick walk. Seating around the central terrace area is provided by a wide semicircular wall of random-coursed stone with a pink granite coping. The planted

areas east and west of the terrace feature ornamental and shade trees surrounded by ivy beds and formal evergreen hedges.

- e. Reservation No. 233: North of the avenue, west of Ninth Street, south of A Street, SE. Officially identified in 1884, this trapezoidal reservation abutting City Square No. 921 is still surrounded by the cast-iron post-and-chain fence erected around it between 1887-94. In the 1920s it contained a circular flower bed. Today the park is in a neglected state, and most of the fence finials are missing. The open space features grass and a single ornamental tree in the southeast corner. A ca. 1960s playground object is located in the northwest corner. The adjacent house facing onto the space is separated from it by a brick path spanning the west side of the park.
- f. Reservation No. 234: North of the avenue, east of Ninth Street, south of A Street, SE. Officially recognized in 1887 and graded and sodded by 1894, this freestanding triangle is now maintained by the D.C. Public Space project. It consists of a flower bed of low-maintenance wild flowers and ornamental grasses. It is surrounded by a cast-iron post-and-chain fence with OPB&G finials erected in 1903. A PB&G reservation marker remains in its most acute angle.
- g. Reservation No. 235: South of the avenue, north of A Street, between 13th and 14th streets, NE. This triangular reservation abutting City Square No. N1035 was officially identified in 1884. Water was introduced in 1908, and the park was probably improved within the next decade with the coping, trees, and shrubs that appear in a 1927 photograph. Today it has two concrete paths running through it; one near the acute angle of the triangle, and another towards the rear property line. Ornamental trees and shrubs line the walks and two metal-support plank benches with backs face north along the south side. Belgian blocks in front of the benches are poorly maintained.
- h. Reservation No. 236: North of the avenue at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE. This trapezoidal reservation was first recognized in 1884 but was not improved until 1910-11 when it was graded, sodded, and laid with a brick sidewalk. Today it shares the block with the Brown Memorial African Methodist Church in the abutting City Square No. 1031. The grassy area within a border of Washington quarter-round coping is surrounded by a deciduous hedge and features three ornamental trees. An asphalt path leads from the North Carolina Avenue side to the entry to the church on the west side of the reservation. South of the reservation is a brick median strip on North Carolina Avenue.
- i. Reservation No. 237: North of the avenue east of 14th Street at Constitution Avenue, NE. This triangle was officially identified in 1887 and was first improved in 1910. A small reservation to start with, this triangle has been divided by an access to North Carolina

Avenue from 14th Street cut through it in 1954. The two remaining triangles feature grass and a concrete sidewalk parallel to 14th Street. South of each triangle are medians on North Carolina Avenue, the west one brick and the east one sod.

- j. Reservation No. 238: South of the avenue at 15th Street and Constitution Avenue, NE. First recognized in 1884, this triangle appears much the same today as it did in 1927. It consists of a sodded green, worn in the center, surrounded by quarter-round coping, and featuring a small tree in the northeast corner. North of the triangle is a brick median strip on North Carolina Avenue.
- k. Reservation No. 239. North of the avenue, at Constitution Avenue and 16th Street, NE. Although this large triangular reservation abutting City Square No. 1068 was officially identified in 1884, by 1927 it remained unimproved and served as a refuse heap. Today, 16th Street divides it into a small triangle and a trapezoid. The sodded triangle to the east has a concrete sidewalk on axis with 16th Street; the larger trapezoid, to the west, is sodded with quarter-round coping and scattered shade and ornamental trees. South of the reservation is a grass median on North Carolina Avenue.

- 5. Front yards: For the most part, residences along the avenue have long front yards. Most are landscaped and enclosed with fences.

- C. Framing elements: For the most part, continuous rowhouses, some with protruding bays and stoops, frame the right-of-way and define a residential streetscape.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

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Board of Public Works. "Exhibit Chart of Improved Streets and Avenues." 1872.

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Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.

Toner, Joseph M. "Sketch of Washington in Embryo." 1874.

B. Early Views:

1927-29: Survey photographs of each reservation (photographs of the reservations transferred from NPS to the District of Columbia are in the HSW Reservations Collection).

C. Bibliography:

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Goode, James. Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979.

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1993

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.